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Problematizing the authentic self in conceptualizations of emotional dissonance.
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Abstract

With exhortations to be 'your authentic self' proliferating in workplaces what does this mean for emotion and identity management at work? This paper explores the relationship between emotional labour and identity. It focuses on the tension or 'emotional dissonance' that can be experienced when a job role requires the display of organisationally appropriate emotions. Experiences of emotional dissonance are examined through in-depth interviews and diary study with human resource professionals. We tease out the contradictions participants are immersed in, the affective sensemaking they engage in about such contradictions and demonstrate the individual's capacity for multiple selves to address contextual demands. From this, a new conceptual lens on emotional dissonance is proposed. Conventional conceptualisations view dissonance as a clash between 'real' and 'false' emotion predicated on an authentic self that is transmuted in organisational settings. Our theoretical contribution is to argue that emotional dissonance arises from the struggle to construct a situationally salient self in the face of conflicting emotions and loyalties to competing selves and values. The struggle in emotional labour is not with 'the truth of oneself' but rather with identifying which self to foreground in a given situation.

Keywords: Emotional Labour; Emotional Dissonance; Authenticity; Identity; Multiple Selves; Sensemaking

Introduction

In organisations, as in any social domain, individuals manage their feelings and emotional expressions to conform to expectations regarding how they should behave. The customer service agent suppresses frustration at an abusive customer to provide 'service with a smile' (Pugh, 2001); the healthcare worker shows sympathy to patients and their families (Grandey et al, 2012); in times of crisis (e.g. downsizing) the manager suppresses anxiety and displays optimism to maintain the morale of the team (Humphrey et al, 2008). In each setting workers perform what Hochschild (1983) refers to as 'emotional labour' i.e. they portray emotions that are not necessarily felt to comply with organisational norms or 'display rules' which dictate the kinds of emotions that are (un)acceptable in particular situations.

Managing emotion and emotional displays at work can lead to positive employee outcomes such as job satisfaction (Bhave & Glomb, 2015), higher personal accomplishment (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Humphrey et al, 2015), and better tips from customers (Hulsheger et al, 2015). However, research predominantly indicates negative individual consequences including emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2003; Kenworthy et al, 2014); burnout (Grandey, Dickter & Sin, 2004); de-personalisation, low job satisfaction and organisational withdrawal (e.g. Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Hulsheger & Schewe, 2011). Most theorists attribute such negative consequences to 'emotional dissonance' or the clash between 'real' feelings and a 'false' display (e.g. Hochschild, 1983; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2000). They argue that when organisational display rules differ from how the employee actually feels, the resultant discrepancy creates an unstable state/psychological tension within the individual leaving them struggling for 'authenticity of the self' in interactions which over time leads to strain and distress.

Conceptualisations of emotional dissonance (ED) in emotional labour (EL) research however remain inconsistent (Pugh et al, 2011) and despite being generally accepted as a critical lynchpin in the EL-strain relationship, exactly *how* dissonance impacts on workers is not yet fully understood (Côte, 2005; Pugh et al, 2011;Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). Indeed some theorists (Côte, 2005; Pugh et al, 2011) argue that one reason for contradictory findings regarding the consequences of performing EL is lack of clarity around ED. We agree, and further argue that the essentialist view of identity (the idea that we have one true self that is coherent, unproblematic, and stable) which underpins most conceptualisations of ED is at the root of much of the confusion. Consequently, as an alternative to the dominant approach in EL literature, the aim of this paper is to explore workers' experience of dissonance using an interpretivist lens on identity (see Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016) which acknowledges multiple selves.

Self-consistency explanations of ED we argue are insufficient to account for worker experiences of EL. They ignore the social and relational nature of self-construction (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005); are at odds with contemporary theories which acknowledge multiple identities that are simultaneously salient (e.g. Markus & Nurius, 1986; Strauss et al, 2012; for a review see Ramarajan, 2014; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016) and do not account for evidence that dissonance and 'faking' can be tolerated (Pugh et al, 2011) and at times result in positive employee outcomes. Furthermore as Tracy & Trethewey (2005) note, the concern with (in)authenticity has led to an individualised focus on (in)ability to cope with EL, ignoring the influence of organisational context and managerial control practices on how EL is experienced as well as its consequences.

Here, drawing on a more dynamic view of identity, we explore the ED experiences of Human Resource Professionals (HRPs). Sitting at the interface between employees and the organisation, HRPs are expected to implement strategies and policies to secure profit and performance while simultaneously safe-guarding employee well-being (Rynes, 2004). At times these goals collide and the HRP struggles with balancing divergent needs of multiple stakeholders. This can be emotionally challenging, as one HRP explains:

> emotionally it's a very difficult job because you're kind of half way, you're a manager and you're on that side of the fence, but you have to deal with real problems that general people are having as well and you don't want to be perceived as being biased…. [but] you have to empathise with people. (P9: Female HR Generalist)

Exploring the EL of HRPs and more specifically how they navigate the destabilising experience of dissonance, thus provides a unique opportunity to glimpse the in-situ factors that influence ED.

We build on Tracy's work which suggests that the difficulties of EL are not necessarily because it violates a 'real self'. Drawing on contemporary interpretivist identity theories (for overview see Alvesson, 2010; Alvesson et al, 2008; Ramarajan, 2014) and loosely adopting Ashforth & Schinoff's (2016) framework of situated identity construction, we conceptualise ED as arising from tensions between multiple selves and identity motives rather than tensions between a real/false self. Our aim is (i) to explore if an interpretivist identity lens is useful to interrogate experiences of dissonance during EL and (ii) if such a lens offers more conceptual clarity on ED and helps to explain contradictory findings on the individual consequences of EL. Our contribution is to conceptualise ED as a tension arising from conflicting emotion and loyalties to *competing* selves and values. Also, in contrast to individualised accounts of ED that pervade the literature, we demonstrate the importance of context (e.g. display rules; risks of non-compliance; others' reactions, social support) in the experience and resolution of dissonance and indeed the process of constructing different selves. We begin by outlining

current conceptualisations of ED and assumptions of self 'authenticity' underpinning such work.

Emotional Dissonance & Authenticity

Most researchers follow Hochschild's (1983) original thesis and her view that EL involves the organisation's attempt, through management imposed display rules and normative control, to exploit worker affect and colonise 'worker souls' for commercial gain (e.g. Grandey, 2000; Brook, 2009). Hochschild argues that when organisationally mandated emotional displays conflict with felt emotion, employees must work to produce the appropriate display. They do this through 'surface acting' (amplifying, suppressing or 'faking' affect without changing feelings) or 'deep acting' (trying to feel the required emotion by reappraising the situation or re-focusing attention). If the gap between the 'on-the-job self' (required display) and 'the natural self' (how one actually feels) is too great it can lead to an internal state of tension or 'emotional dissonance' (Hochschild, 1983 p.90). This act of pretence, Hochschild asserts, is harmful to the individual as it can lead to a 'transmutation' of one's 'inner self' or a separation from one's 'true' self. Consequently a real/false-self dichotomy and (in)authenticity explanations of dissonance and its impact on workers pervade the EL literature (e.g. Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2000, 2003; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015).

Hochschild's dissonance paradigm has remained a dominant theoretical orientation in explanations of the consequences for workers of performing EL. Indeed most authors argue that ED is the central mechanism linking EL to well-being (Simpson & Stroth, 2004) and that other mechanisms (e.g. effort, control, EL strategy i.e. surface or deep acting) impact well-being through their relationship with ED. Evidence for the intervening role of ED is however

mixed (Côte et al, 2008; Pugh, 2011). While most studies indicate a positive association between ED and strain (e.g. Hulsheger & Schewe, 2011; Kammeyer-Mueller et al, 2013; Wagner et al, 2014) some reveal little support for this relationship (e.g. Zerbe, 2000; Glomb et al, 2002). In fact ED has been positively related to job involvement (Kruml & Geddes, 2000) and personal accomplishment (Zapf et al, 1999) and Côte et al (2008) argue that ED may not be as psychologically taxing as previously thought. Furthermore, whether ED effects are direct or through its impact on other mechanisms such as effort, EL strategy used or indeed inauthenticity is unclear.

The conflicting findings may in part be due to differences in the operationalisation of the ED construct (Kruml & Geddes, 2000). Some position ED as the antecedent condition required for EL (Middleton, 1989; Rubin et al, 2005), in effect the 'disturbing disequilibrium' (Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000) due to discrepancy between felt emotion and display rules. Thus, ED is thought to affect well-being by increasing the effort involved in emotion regulation and depleting emotional energy (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Grandey et al, 2005). Whereas others position ED as a discrepancy between the enacted display and a subjective experience of emotion (Morris & Feldman, 1996; Mann, 1999) and therefore a consequence of performing EL (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Mann (1999) for example argues that it is not enough to feel dissonant this must be accompanied by an emotional display which is in conflict with the felt emotion. Others focus on the differential impacts due to EL strategy used. For instance, dissonance has been found to be positively related to surface acting (Wagner et al, 2014) and unrelated to deep acting (see Kammeyer-Mueller et al, 2013). In turn surface acting has been found to negatively impact employee well-being while deep acting has been found to positively impact well-being (e.g. Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Hulsheger & Schewe, 2011) as such ED is thought to impact well-being through EL strategy.

Endeavours to understand its role continue (Pugh et al, 2011; Grandey et al, 2012; Wagner et al, 2014) but Hochschild's self-consistency explanation for ED persists. We propose that a more nuanced view of the self that moves beyond the real/false dichotomy at the heart of much work on ED is required. Doing so may give greater insight into how ED arises, i.e. where the sources of dissonance may be found (beyond assumptions of a real/false self clash), how people attempt to resolve dissonance and what its impacts may be. We turn now to existing critiques of dichotomous views of self and present a more complex account of selves that sheds a different light on the performance and experience of affect in the workplace.

Constructing selves and emotion at work

While not ignoring the evidence regarding the vital role of dissonance in determining the consequences of EL, some analysts take issue with the essentialist notion of self and identity that underpins the dissonance paradigm. Tracy and Trethewey (2005) for instance critique the idea that emotion is more authentic before it enters the realm of organisations where it is 'transmuted' and thus 'processed, standardised' for organisational ends (Hochschild, 1983, p.153). They also note that the self is conceptualised in integrated terms 'assuming that a person has a single self that transcending context can be known' (Martin et al, 1998, p.437). Such views, they suggest, do not reflect contemporary perspectives on identity. Most contemporary theories, acknowledge some version of a social rather than an essential self (for reviews see Alvesson et al, 2008; Alvesson, 2010; Ramajaran, 2014; Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). Also, rather than viewing personal and social identity as mutually exclusive, contemporary scholars view identities as simultaneously salient and multiple based on organisational membership, profession, gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and family

role(s) (see Ramarajan, 2014 for a review). This multiplicity can create identity challenges. Ibarra and Obodaru (2016) for example explore the precarities of juggling competing selves, highlighting experiences of ambiguity and liminality. Such juggling, as Ladge et al (2012) argue, happens concurrently. Thus the self is not seen as a fixed structure and identity is understood as a struggle to construct a coherent subjective experience set within social contexts offering multiple, and sometimes conflicting, identity options and indeed including attempts to control such subjectivities. For instance, Alvesson et al (2008, p.6) note that identity 'refers to subjective meanings and experiences, to our ongoing efforts to address the twin questions 'Who am I' and --by implication-- 'how should I act'?'. This conceptualisation of identity is particularly salient when exploring EL as at its essence is the struggle to know which display or performance ought to be given.

In a similar vein, Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) emphasise the interactional and contextual nature of identity construction. They particularly highlight the sensemaking processes through which individuals forge identities within organisations. They posit a dynamic tension between possible identities which becomes particularly acute under conditions of ambiguity such as task failures; value and belief discrepancies between the self and the organisation or events that cause individuals to question what is unfolding around them. Organisational attempts to trigger sensemaking or influence individual meaning making in a desired direction are encapsulated via sensebreaking (i.e. discouraging 'bad habits' or beliefs and values that are incongruent with the organisationally desired identity) or sensegiving (i.e. conveying information about preferred identities) through for example induction training, performance management processes and the use of rewards/sanctions. In such situations individuals recognise inadequacy in their current understanding which triggers sensemaking attempts to understand 'what's going on here' (Goffman, 1961). This sensemaking is also

self-referential (Weick, 1995) and the individual simultaneously tries to understand 'who am I?' in this context.

Drawing on a wealth of identity research Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) explore a range of motives driving identity construction of which self-coherence or authenticity is just one. Others include a need for: belonging (to feel close to/accepted by others,); identification (with another individual, role, collective); self-efficacy (a sense of competence); optimal distinctiveness (balancing being similar/different from others); and self-presentation (projecting a socially desirable self). Features of the context, they argue, as well as individual predisposition determine the strength and salience of motives.

Through sensemaking efforts, Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) argue, individuals attempt to 'construct identities that at least *they* view as relatively stable and coherent, whether or not they are in actuality' (p.113). They extract cues from others' behaviour towards them (social validation); the organisational context (e.g. organisational rules, norms, conversations); and beyond the organisation from their own retrospective narratives of experience and 'toolkit of extant and contextually diverse identities' (p.120) and wider social, historical and institutional cues (Weber & Glynn, 2006) to make sense of disruption in their current understanding. Through retrospection they decide what is relevant, favouring plausibility and sufficiency over accuracy (Weick, 1995). The outcome, if successful, is a situated identity that 'meets at least in the moment, some combination of salient identity motives' (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016, p.127) and allows an understanding of self in the local context.

The above more complex view of the self is not however reflected in much of the EL literature and in conceptualisations of ED. Indeed the idea that we can construct many

possible ‘selves’ and the preceding exploration of contemporary views on identities problematises the real/false dichotomy as being at the root of experiencing incongruence. Furthermore, as Tracy and Trethewey (2005) note, by emphasising issues of (in)authenticity, most EL theories underestimate the influence of social interaction, everyday practice, and societal and organisational norms in continually (re)constructing emotion and shaping the very notion of ‘real’ feelings (Waldron, 1994). Thus, while the focus in the EL field on dissonance and authenticity may seem justified, because most people ‘tend to believe they have one authentic self’ (Ashforth & Tomuik, 2000, p.185) it has obscured the ways organisational norms actually work to construct identity.

Similar to Ashforth and Schinoff’s (2016) ‘situationally salient’ self, Tracy and Trethewey (2005) propose a ‘crystallised self’ which is neither real nor fake, is multi-dimensional, and not flattened by managerialist ideologies. They however maintain Hochschild’s politicised notion of EL and emphasise the constraining effects of organisational processes on the employee’s ability to maintain preferred understandings of identity. Others debate the position that rhetorics of corporate culture are an ideological assault on workers and that subjectivity is a derivative of organisational control (e.g. Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Kuhn, 2006; Bardon et al, 2016) acknowledging instead, that people are ‘(co)authors of their subjectivities’ (Kuhn, 2006, p.684) and can actively resist and challenge the subjectivities offered to them (Linstead & Thomas, 2002). Bolton (2000) for instance argues that the employee is a ‘skilled social actor’ who draws on different sets of feeling rules (commercial, social, professional codes) to match feeling and ‘face’ with situation.

Here we find it useful to align with interpretivist views (i.e. Alvesson, 2010; Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016) which acknowledge multiplicity, struggle and the influence of social

interaction and contextual pressures in identity (re)construction. Also, following Kuhn (2006), we allow for some agency and subjectivity in the construction of selves in a given context. We are not privileging agency over structure but acknowledge both. As Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) note, in constructing a situationally salient self, the role of social validation (responses from others) and the wider context of organisational sensegiving and sensebreaking practices cannot be ignored. Organisations create 'preferred' identities and idealised subject positions that promote organisational interests but rules are open to interpretation and negotiation (Salaman, 1983). Thus the process of self construction is best understood by focusing on both the interactional context of rules, norms and social structure as well as considering the motives, meanings and interpretations of the individual who is thinking, feeling and interacting, reflectively and unreflectively (Denzin, 2001).

In summary, given the weight of research evidence, there is no doubt that ED is central in the EL-strain relationship but there is still a lack of clarity regarding the definition of the ED construct, its operation and potential effects on well-being. Against this backdrop, and a more fundamental critique of conceptualisations of the self and emotion as more or less 'authentic', our research examines the ED experienced by Human Resource Professionals. We ask: What is the nature of ED experienced by HRPs during EL performances?; How do they make sense of and attempt to resolve this experience?; What are the individual consequences of the experience of ED? These questions are explored using an alternative theoretical lens through which to view the experience of ED. We contend that ED stems from an awareness of competing versions of selves that cannot be easily reconciled. Oddly, critiquing Hochschild's (1983) assumption of a natural self at the root of dissonance may in fact honour her arguments that organisational requirements shape displays. As we move the boundaries of self from an essentialist individualist account of identity to a more socially constructed

account, we can make more visible the role of organisations in shaping not only emotional displays but also the selves that are possible.

Method

The research reported here is drawn from a wider study into the experience of emotional labour in the HR role. The appropriate management of emotion is a central yet under-explored aspect of HR work (O'Brien & Linehan, 2014). In managing the employment relationship, HRPs as O'Brien & Linehan (2014) note, deal with emotionally challenging situations, and must balance multiple and contradictory role expectations each with associated emotional display rules. For instance, they are required to be the 'company face' or 'rule enforcer' expressing social control emotions (reprimanding; disapproval) to protect organisational interests; the 'champion' who expresses empathy and provides support to employees and managers; the 'professional' taking a measured approach to portray competence; the 'honest broker' upholding the ethical climate of the organisation and the 'cheerleader' who expresses enthusiasm to maintain morale. At the nexus where competing HR allegiances collide and contradictory display rules converge, the HRP must decide which role to play and work to produce an appropriate emotional display.

The study was conducted within a grounded theory framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) which is particularly useful for 'gaining theoretical insights and pulling back the curtain on the complexities of modern life' (Corley, 2015, p2). We followed Strauss & Corbin (1990) and Turner (1983) and tentatively framed key constructs such as 'emotional labour' and 'display rules' as a guide for subsequent inductive theory development. This approach, also taken by Harris (2002), ensured that while insights into EL were informed by existing research, they remained grounded in data.

Participants

We adopted a gradual and purposeful sampling strategy. Initially sampling was driven by the need to understand the experience of EL across different levels and aspects of the HR role. As the study progressed, participant choice was based on the need to explore emerging propositions. Fifteen participants took part in the study (see Appendix 1). Data collection ceased after twenty interviews as 'data saturation' was deemed to have occurred, as Martin & Turner (1986) state, 'by the time three or four sets of data have been analysed, the majority of useful concepts will have been discovered' (p.149).

Data collection methods

In-depth Interviews. Each participant took part in an interview of 60-90 minutes duration. Five participants also completed a diary (see below) and were interviewed on a second occasion to explore the reported interactions, leading to twenty interviews in total. Initially participants were asked about the pleasant and unpleasant aspects of their work and the feelings these evoked. Then, similar to critical incident interviewing (Flanagan, 1954), a method that turns anecdotes into data through the systematic interrogation of the context, behaviour and feelings during and after 'incidents', they were asked to describe interactions involving these emotions, including the context, who was involved, what happened, how they felt during and after, the emotions they displayed and why. Where there was a difference between felt and displayed emotions, attempts were made to understand this experience through follow-up questions (e.g. Why did you think it was (in)appropriate to display this emotion; Is there an expectation that you should behave in a certain way? From whom?). Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

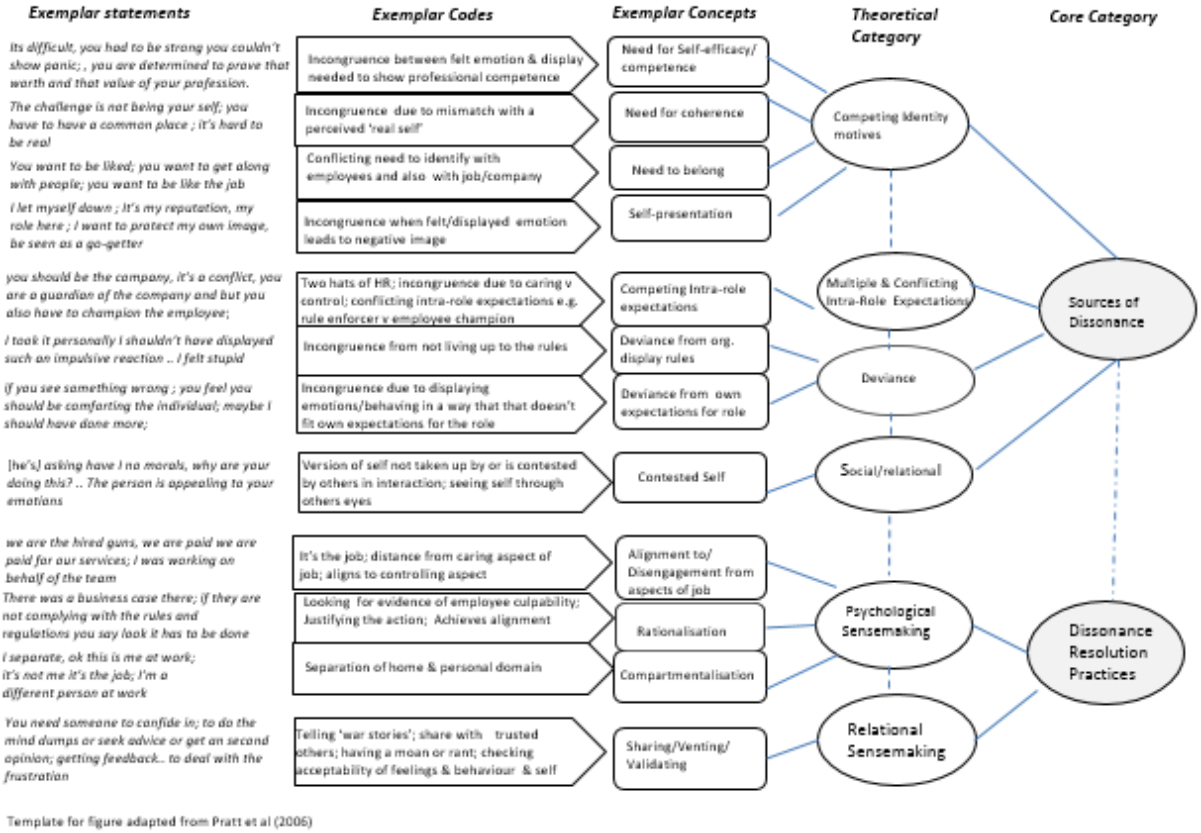
Diary Method. In recollecting and reflecting on experiences at work, facts can be reconstructed in the telling and recall can be negatively affected by the length of time between the experience and reflection (Denzin, 2001). Thus a diary method was used to reduce the retrospective elements of accounts and get 'real time' examples of interactions. Similar to Tschan et al (2005) we based our diary on the Rochester Interaction Record method (Nezlek et al 1983). Following the first interview, participants were asked to complete an 'Interaction Record' for any interaction lasting more than 10 minutes over the course of a week. Five participants completed the diary providing 28 interaction records and while useful examples of EL interactions were given, the data lacked detail. For this reason the recorded examples were explored during a second interview and thus 'brought to life'.

We found these methods particularly useful in exploring EL. Emotions are difficult to investigate given their elusive nature. The critical incident approach however, as Hargreaves (2005) notes, provides a context for emotion, embeds it in a narrative and makes it real. Having to recall actual incidents in detail pushes people past 'vague euphemisms and bland generalities' to explore 'gritty details' of their experience (Hargreaves, 2005 p.970). This is not only useful for capturing meaning but also for uncovering context (Butterfield et al, 2005) which is particularly important in exploring EL given that it is performed within the parameters of individual, relational and organisational demands. The approach has been previously used in EL research (Hargreaves, 2005; Waddington, 2005) but remains under-utilised in the field. Here we found it a valuable way to access emotion. The use of probing questions about actual incidents encouraged participants to relive situations as depth-fully as possible and to fully communicate their experience of thinking, feeling and behaving. This provided rich insights into their interpretations of interactions and the sense they made of events including their motives for action and understanding of self in the situation.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the grounded theory approach. Starting with the first interview, each transcript was subject to line-by-line open coding. Codes considered to have commonality were grouped together into a concept with in-vivo codes (interviewees' words) used where appropriate. Concepts related to a common theme were grouped into a category. New codes and categories were integrated into the data set when they emerged through analysis of subsequent transcripts. The 'constant comparison method' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), was central in the analysis. Codes, concepts and categories were continually compared, similarities/differences noted, and confirming/disconfirming evidence of emerging categories sought. In an iterative process, instances of categories, and related sub-categories, were revisited repeatedly and subsumed into core categories (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Example of coding process



Template for figure adapted from Pratt et al (2006)

The coding process resulted in a list of codes and categories that were attached to the text. Following Charmaz' (2006) recommendation, to understand the context of EL and relationships between categories, analysis proceeded on an interaction by interaction basis (to in a sense create the variables), then a whole-case basis (looking across the whole interview to understand the context within the variables worked) and finally a between-case basis (interview by interview) to compare similarities/differences. Throughout the process theoretical propositions were noted in memos.

Interesting insights into situated experiences of ED emerged from our data. We now turn to discuss these findings, presenting data from across the twenty interviews (including those follow-up interviews which explored the diary data). We begin by exploring the sources of ED, then consider participant attempts to resolve this experience and finally when such attempts failed. The individual consequences of dissonance are threaded throughout.

Findings

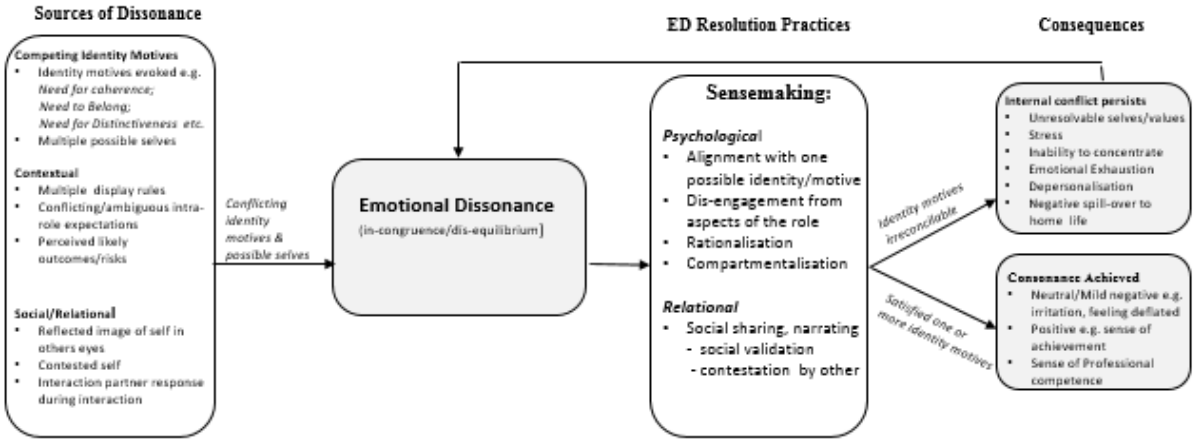
> You have to wear a mask in HR but …while you might be holding up the company face it might actually be how you feel, … if your role is at odds with your own personal style or competences then you're going to have things in your head or [be] under stress …you can't be Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde … there is some element of mask it would only be a peripheral amount, a small change or temporary change, because if it is on-going you won't know who you are (P6: Male, HR Director)

Emotional Labour emerged as a central aspect of HR work and the experience of emotional dissonance was a key facet of EL performances. Participants recalled many interactions where they managed their feelings and emotional expressions to achieve an organisationally appropriate display. Having to *'wear a mask*', recounted by the participant above, was at times relatively easy because there was some congruence between how the HRP felt and what was required. But at other times the mismatch between felt and required/ displayed emotion resulted in psychological discomfort/incongruence '*you're going to have things in*

your head or [be] *under stress*'; '*you won't know who you are'* which was key in determining the consequences of EL performances.

As we will demonstrate, our data suggests that ED derives from a variety of sources and we contend that the psychological tension experienced is due the challenge of reconciling the multiple and sometimes competing identity options that surface during interactions. Our analysis also shed light on participant attempts to make sense of/resolve this experience and the impact this has on them. These findings are summarised in Figure 2 and elaborated on in what follows.

Figure 2: Mapping the relationships between dissonance, situated sensemaking, and its impacts



Sources of Dissonance

The experience of ED and associated psychological discomfort was shaped by a number of factors including: competing identity motives evoked by the interaction; contextual factors (e.g. multiple/conflicting emotion display rules and intra-role expectations, risks of non-compliance); and social/relational factors (others' responses in situ etc.). While we discuss each factor in turn it is worth noting that in any one interaction dissonance might be due to a range of factors working together to modulate experiences.

Competing Identity Motives. In the following extract, the HRP discusses the impact of having to wear what she called a '*mask of professionalism*' when announcing redundancies.

> the challenge it's not being yourself ,.. but you just get on with it, but you want to be liked and ..to get on with people.. you say I did that to the best of my ability.. but you have to be real with yourself … you didn't make them redundant the company did, it's hard because you are the company……[after] I'd burst into tears (P12: Female, HR Director)

We could interpret this account from the traditional identity-dissonance perspective attributing the difficulties of EL to the individual's struggle for 'authenticity'. However, using an alternative lens, we argue that the 'masks' participants speak of can be interpreted as evidence of foregrounding one self that conceals others, rather than evidence that a 'real self' is hidden behind the mask. For example, in the above extract, dissonance arises from a clash between belonging motives ('*you want to be liked and you want to get on with people*') and self-efficacy motives (*'I did that to the best of my ability*') and finally motives of organisational identification *('you are the company*'). There are multiple possible identities that don't easily align and while the HRP foregrounds the 'company identity' to get through the interaction, the act of suppressing the other possible identities causes tension and results in negative impacts for the participant ('*I'd burst into tears*').

Our data shows that multiple identity motives are activated during role performances creating identity challenges. The excerpt below for example reveals the HRP's need to be professional and to have authority but also to be friendly:

> I'm guarded, I try and keep a certain level of professional distance from them [employees] but you want to be friendly and there is a girl here I think I've let her in too much, let my guard down too much.. it's my own fault, I blame myself for it, I think I lost a certain amount of power and a certain amount of distance … it's the authority, if we ended up in some kind of disciplinary situation I wouldn't be very comfortable with it. (P13: Female, HR Generalist)

In another example a participant described feeling annoyed because his manager reprimanded him for not foreseeing a problem with a customer's account, despite the fact that his access to

the accounts system was limited. He went on to describe feeling annoyed with himself for hiding his emotions:

> I had to take it on the chin [but] it left me feeling very cross with myself afterwards…. the instinct is to defend myself and maintain my own perceived level of respect or esteem that I am held in. (P2: Male, HR Manager)

We can interpret this as dissonance arising from competing identity motives i.e. the need for self-presentation versus the need to feel, and be recognised by others as, competent. It appears that dissonance is not necessarily due to suppression of a 'real' self. Rather, in contextualised interactions, which are sometimes ambiguous, tension stems from difficulty in deciding which identity to foreground. This 'choice' is not just an intra-psychic experience but, as we show below, is constructed from the interplay between individual interpretation of context and the constraints of professional and organisational norms. We turn now to consider these contextual sources of dissonance in more depth.

Contextual Elements. The struggle between competing identity motives was compounded by multiple/contradictory role expectations and associated emotion display rules for the HR role and the perceived likely risks of non-compliance. As the extracts below exemplify, HRPs are expected to perform a number of contradictory roles that call out a range of possible identities.

> I am a HR person and I can't get too friendly with people… it's like being a Guard [police officer] the perfect HR person is someone who can also empathise with people. (P9: Female, HR Generalist)

> I am the public face of the company so there is an expectation that I maintain a professional veneer, but also be friendly & approachable. (P2: Male, HR Manager)

While the emotional display rules of the role incorporate the requirement to show empathy and concern for others, from an organisational perspective the most salient identity is the detached professional who doesn't show emotion. The pressure to conform to this professional ideal structured and constrained participant behaviour, determining which

role/self they played and in the excerpts below participants describe what they perceive to be the likely risk of non-conformance:

> people would perceive.. that you lost control, I think when you have an emotional outburst people can perceive it as what position you were putting forward, it has less credence or credibility. (P1: Male, HR Vice President)

> you need not to be seen as being vulnerable to the emotional side of it. (P15: Male, HR Manager)

However, as we have seen earlier, at times foregrounding the organisationally preferred self created dissonance and a sense of failure in relation to other salient identities, leaving the HRP struggling. This tension was heightened, as we demonstrate below, when faced with others' reactions indicating that it is not just the more distal organisational norms and expectations that constrain behaviour but also the reaction of the immediate other.

Social/Relational: During a disciplinary meeting, the HRP below initially manages his conflicting emotions by aligning to the corporate self. However, this alignment is difficult to maintain when confronted by the reaction of the employee and the HRP is thrown back into dis-equilibrium.

> I was concerned about the company being exposed obviously from a litigation standpoint but also in doing the right thing by her but she was literally bending down in tears.. I was torn between my feelings of wanting to help the girl and my responsibility to the company... I was always thinking at the back of my mind labour court, high court, I had my two hats on. (P2: Male HR Manager)

From a company point of view the HRP should foreground the professional self and display detached objectivity but the employee appeals to his identity as a humane HR professional, which presents a challenge to the HRP's moral identity. The mirrored reflection of self is powerful and he spoke about the personal consequences this and other similar interactions had:

> that's a very draining time…it's usually expected you get back to work.. do emails or go to the next meeting and you can't actually do that you need time to step away. (P2: Male, HR Manager)

Fulfilling one aspect of the role (rule enforcer) and one identity motive (to be seen as the competent HR professional) at times meant failing in other equally important aspects of the

role (employee champion) and identity motives (need to belong, to be accepted by others). The tension this caused was echoed across participant accounts:

> from an emotional perspective it [disciplining a manager] made me feel that I wasn't doing my job, he was in tears..I questioned my own ability then… maybe I should have done more, you know it does get you thinking and it does get the emotions going… you don't like to let people down.. he felt I wasn't fighting his corner and staff could do what they bloody liked. (P11: Male, HR Manager)

> You wouldn't blame the guys, they weren't paid that well and you would be disciplining them over time-keeping we went to final written with her in terms of her time-keeping ….she was crying….afterwards I found it very tough and thought that person there has lost their job you have to keep that all in but for me it was difficult. (P12: Female, HR Director)

So far our data demonstrates that the experience of incongruence may stem from *conflicting* emotions that result from *competing* identity motives (one cannot easily *belong* in a work group as well as being *competent* in making people in that work group redundant); competing contextual demands and finally relational challenges arising in particular interactions. We now discuss participant attempts to resolve dissonance through in–situ sensemaking. We see further evidence of the importance of the contextual and relational nature of dissonance not only in how it is experienced but in its resolution.

ED Resolution Practices

Experiencing ED triggered sensemaking which, if successful, led to a sense of equilibrium/consonance and in turn mild or even positive individual outcomes (e.g. sense of achievement, thus bolstering a self-efficacy identity motive). To understand what was going on, who they were and how they should act in a particular situation, participants drew on organisational expectations and constraints, professional codes of conduct and wider discourses about the 'right thing to do'. Two aspects of sensemaking were particularly evident from our data: (i) the internal work that participants did to justify their actions, which we label 'psychological' sensemaking and (ii) sensemaking through discussions with others, labelled here as 'relational'. While both processes were inter-related, for clarity here we discuss each in turn.

Psychological sensemaking. In a relatively routine disciplinary interaction, the HRP below experiences dissonance between her felt emotion (experiencing some discomfort and empathy for employee) and the required display (neutrality) and this experience prompts sensemaking about the interaction, her role and the course of action taken:

> If the job isn't being done properly and if there are disciplinary issues they need to be dealt with and I have no problem dealing with them but again it's not very nice to be disciplining someone, if they are not complying with the rules and regulations of their job …you come out of it feeling deflated but then you also say look it had to be done. (P7: Female, HR Manager)

Experienced ED is reconciled by foregrounding a particular identity i.e. the rule enforcer disciplining an employee. This temporary alignment and identification with an aspect of the work-self is achieved by evoking employee culpability '*if they are not complying with the rules and regulations'*. For the participant this rationalisation is plausible and sufficient and the 'rule enforcer' identity thus becomes situationally salient. Participants regularly drew on their 'company identity' to dissolve the unease they felt:

> You are the company, the company is paying your salary …..even when there was redundancies it wasn't nice but there was a business case there and the [parent] company decided to pack up so it was a case of go do it. (P12: Female, HR Director)

> I felt bad for her but had to safe-guard the organisation in terms of setting a benchmark in terms of what was acceptable behaviour and what wasn't. (P14: Female, HR Manager)

Such situations typically led to neutral or mild negative consequences (e.g. feeling 'deflated') and dissonance was resolved.

In other instances the enacted identity was that of the 'detached professional'. In doing so participants avoided getting to know employees or alternatively rationalised that they were acting in a 'professional' manner when expressed emotions were not genuine.

> Because of disciplinary stuff and that, it's easier to be in that kind of conversation with somebody that you don't have an emotional bond, that you don't know personally, what their wife's name is or how many kids they have… I would keep a distance from a lot of people. (P5: Female, HR Generalist)

> I take things to heart and I will get upset about things.. but I'll never go up and down and rant and rave… I'd love to curb the crying… there has be a certain degree of professionalism to how you operate. (P12: Female, HR Director)

Participants also gave numerous examples where they compartmentalised or separated their '*home'* and '*work*' self to comply with display rules.

> I separate my work,….we are the hired guns we are paid for our services.. I compartmentalise .. I'd say at the end of the day it's about living with yourself and your mind if you're at one with your own inner conscience that you're doing the right thing then you can rest easy at night. (P6: Male, HR Director)

> this is me at work, this my job and I have separated it… if I don't do my job I'm going to be the person out of a job. (P10: Female, HR Manager)

Compartmentalisation served to reduce the dissonance experienced when feelings conflicted with display requirements and was a protection against negative personal consequences. Role demands were more manageable when they were considered impersonal objects of work.

Even when the experienced ED was more intense, participants described achieving a degree of congruence through such sensemaking practices. For example, the participant below describes the emotions aroused when disciplining a colleague who was accused of bullying employees within his team.

> On the one hand I felt justified because the investigation had shown that the allegations could be upheld, I also felt that I was working on behalf of a team of people who had come to me with issues and it felt good to try and be able to rectify those for them, on the other hand I liked that person [department head] very much but it wasn't a nice feeling, but your job, it had to be done. (P7: Female, HR Manager)

Dissonance was reduced by rationalising the required action e.g. *'I was working on behalf of the team'.* While complete alignment may not be achieved, evoking the company needs allows one identity motive to be satisfied and the HRP reaches sufficient equilibrium to perform the task without suffering undue negative consequences. Thus a 'facet' of the crystallised self (Tracy &Trethewey, 2005) is foregrounded to, at least in situ, resolve ED. Indeed, sometimes participants reported positive outcomes, such as a sense of satisfaction and personal accomplishment, from successfully managing their emotional displays and living up to the professional self, for example:

> The strategy that you have to adopt is put aside those emotions and look for clear outcomes, negotiate logical outcomes and conclusion…..there is a sense of satisfaction that you got this. (P8: Male, HR Manager)

In accounts of ED based on a real/false self dichotomy, since a felt emotion is 'put aside', it would be difficult to account for the positive experience recounted here. However, using the interpretivist identity lens where various identity motives interact with multiple contextual cues (e.g. competing role demands) we can see how ED may be resolved with positive outcomes if the in-situ performance satisfied some important identity motive (being logical and competent in the role) and contributed to a desired identity positioning (in his own eyes and others) as an effective HR professional.

Sensemaking processes of rationalising and compartmentalising all highlight the work on possible selves that individuals engage in to attempt to resolve ED. Such sensemaking also has an important social dimension that can exacerbate or help to resolve ED and we turn to explore that now.

Relational Sensemaking. While, as we saw earlier, an appeal from a particular other in a given interaction could give rise to dissonance, here we explore how dissonance could also be resolved in-situ with others:

> you need to somebody to confide in…there is camaraderie in that everyone knows that you have to put on that persona but everyone else is doing it as well so there's that sense of support. (P7: Female, HR Manager)

> you want to say [to a colleague] can you believe this person actually said that to me, challenged me in this way, and this is what I said, you just want to tell someone and gauge their reaction. (P1: Male, HR Vice-President)

Venting or narrating as Ashforth & Schinoff (2016) note is an active process of making sense of oneself in a local context in a way that is consistent with a salient identity motive. Individuals, they argue, feel more assured and their emergent identities are fortified if their identity enactments are socially validated. In interacting with others participants made sense

of their own actions, using feedback from others as a barometer for their own feelings and to judge if their approach was appropriate. Such social sensemaking allows for the assimilation of new information regarding the self and self in role and indeed the denial of the 'virtual self' (Goffman, 1961) that is implied in the role '*you have to put on a persona'*. In turn this facilitated adjustment, reducing incongruence.

Each example of rationalising ('*it had to be done*'); aligning temporarily to a particular aspect of the work self ('*you have to be professional*'); compartmentalisation ('*this is me at work'*); sharing with others ('*you have to tell someone*') demonstrates how individuals may resolve ED to create a situationally salient emotional display and self. However, in some situations the struggle between competing expectations and allegiances to competing selves is difficult to resolve, sensemaking attempts fail and the experienced dissonance is unresolved leading to negative individual consequences.

Unresolvable Dissonance: When Sensemaking Fails

Sensemaking was particularly difficult when the HRP's personal values were deeply challenged; the display/action was contested by others or contravened display rules; or there were no other HR colleagues to confide in. For example, the participant below explained her difficulty in maintaining the '*company face'* when dismissing an under-performing employee. Her belief that employees were mistreated and underpaid and that the action was unjust heightened the dissonance she felt:

> The challenging bit is maybe not being yourself…because the company face always has to be there…. ……if anyone else had of walked into the office I would have had to send them away because I need time to calm down, even phone calls, I couldn't take. (P10: Female, HR Manager)

Another participant described the difficulty he experienced after wearing a '*mask of professionalism*' when dealing with a complaint of harassment against a manager by an employee.

> I knew she [the employee] was telling the truth but she hadn't kept records so I had to wear a mask of professionalism with him [the manager]…I can carry it for a while, the emotions but I suppose they can kick in very easily….it left me feeling very cross with myself …. it was hard to be real. (P15: Male, HR Manager)

The identity discontinuities that arise from complying with an organisationally mandated emotional display were evident across participant accounts and were difficult to reconcile.

> the complaint against him was upheld but I just feel really bad for him. I would worry about him I've had close contact with them all as well like from a career perspective I do care about them as well so I would just feel awful. (P13: Female, HR Specialist)

> I felt annoyed, I had booked the room for interviews and they [other managers] just took it, I said look that's grand they're in a room full of people I'm not going to have a stand up argument I put my professional foot forward. I'll find somewhere else.. afterwards I was really annoyed for hiding my feelings and not standing up for myself. (P2: Male, HR Manager)

Drawing on Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) we can see various identity motives vying for supremacy but in some interactions the incongruence is too intense to achieve a sufficiently plausible explanation for the action through sensemaking strategies, leaving participants unable to achieve a situationally salient or crystallised self.

Paradoxically, however there were examples of when ED and its negative impacts were experienced when the HRP *didn't* live up to the organisationally mandated self, instead displaying their felt emotion. The participant below described feeling annoyed with herself for displaying her genuine anger, a display which she believes is not consistent with how a HRP should behave:

> I was raging, I cornered the guy who made the complaint [against me] and asked him why, and why he didn't speak to me before ….my emotions were that it was personal against me, I took it personally… I shouldn't have displayed such an impulsive reaction, I could have done it much more calmly.. that's not how someone in HR should behave. (P4: Female HRD Specialist)

Similarly another role holder described a situation where rather than the required calm neutrality he showed empathy for the employee and contempt for the company decision to dismiss her because he felt it was unjust. However his lack of compliance with the rules resulted in very negative physical consequences:

> the expectation would be you remain neutral but I told her I wasn't happy with what the company is doing, I find it hard to stand by it.... if you see something wrong it's difficult to remain neutral…That's

> something that normally I would have it here [points to chest] as a knot and it would remain there and genuinely it's a physiological thing. (P8: Male HR Manager)

Deviance (i.e. not following organisational display rules) tended to result in intensely felt dissonance and negative individual consequences (e.g. feelings of personal failure and professional incompetence). This stemmed mainly from worries over the possible ramifications of deviating from the expected display on the individual and their credibility within the company, such negative consequences often spilled over into the home-life:

> you go home and that replays over in head… the situation or the project and think what? why? what will I change for the next time? (P1: Male, HR Vice President)

> I told them [managers] something I shouldn't have.. I felt really stupid and unprofessional.. The feeling went home with me but I felt so annoyed and embarrassed by it that I didn't tell my wife in case she would get annoyed and worried by it. (P2: Male, HR Manager)

To understand why displaying a felt emotion (which could be labelled an authentic reaction in Hochschild's (1983) terms and thus not likely to give rise to incongruence/ED) leads to such negative impacts, we need to consider the current and desired identity positioning that participants seek to align to – showing your 'real feelings' is problematic if it does not fulfil identity motives of competency and does not fit with the aspirational identity of being seen as a skilled professional in this setting.

Discussion

Emotional dissonance is a central aspect of EL performances but rather than a singular conflict between an authentic self and an organisationally mandated display, our data indicates that ED stems from challenges in reconciling competing emotion and identity possibilities that surface in a given interaction. Such interpretations have resonance with Ashforth & Schinoff's (2016) argument that identity construction stems from a range of identity motives, and call into question explanations of ED based on (in)authenticity. The dissonance experienced by participants varied in intensity and was influenced by contextual factors, with a high level of dissonance more likely when interactions involved conflicting

display rules/role expectations, high stakes for the individual or organisation, and/or required the individual to take action they were not fully committed to or when the displayed behaviour was contested by others. This is an important point of departure from individualised accounts of dissonance that pervade the EL literature.

Experiencing ED triggered sensemaking. Participants drew from cues in the organisational context (organisational norms/rules, conversations) and beyond (professional codes of conduct, previous experience) to enable action. This process involved interlinked psychological (rationalisation, alignment, compartmentalisation) and relational elements (venting, narrating to others). Effort focused on understanding the situation but was also self-referential and if successful, led to a sense of equilibrium. The individual thus achieved a situationally salient or crystallised self and while this did not represent a reconciliation of different selves, different 'facets' of the self were successfully mobilised at different times to enable action without adverse consequences. In fact sometimes positive individual outcomes (e.g. sense of achievement) were experienced. At times however, despite sensemaking attempts, a situationally salient self could not be negotiated between individual, relational and organisational demands. Thus sensemaking failed and the individual's struggle with dissonance was unresolved and negative consequences experienced.

These findings have a number of theoretical and practical implications. We move theorising the impact of EL on well-being from an individual unit of analysis to a more contextualised view of self where individual experience is important but is influenced by contextual factors which pose sensemaking challenges about how best to perform the role and the self in those particular circumstances. We extend Hochschild's work by moving away from authenticity explanations of dissonance and instead consider how emotion, performance, person and

practices combine and are constructed in situated interactions. We accord some agency to the person but also recognise the powerful effects of organisational and cultural discourses in shaping affect, performance etc. Thus we are aligned with Hochschild's concerns about how we are shaped at work but with a more nuanced view of the self in this process which in turn highlights the complexity of the process of negotiating dissonance.

Our re-conceptualisation of the experience of dissonance may help to explain conflicting findings regarding EL, and challenges the assumption in the EL literature that dissonance between felt and expressed emotion invariably results in negative individual consequences. While our findings substantiate the claim that EL is made easier when it confirms an identity which individuals may label as 'real' or 'authentic', as we have seen the 'real' self is continually reconstructed (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005) and to satisfy multiple identity motives, employees develop multiple 'selves' to cope with demands of the job. Granted, at times multiple identities compete with one another creating psychological tension, however at other times multiple identities provide resources that help people fulfil multiple obligations. As Linstead (2001) notes, identities are masks that are actively used, manipulated and created as resources for participation in an on-going masquerade. For example, our participants used the '*mask of professionalism*' to enable them to fulfill their role as a '*rule enforcer*'.

Sensemaking we argue is central to this process, indeed Hochschild (1983) drew on cognitive dissonance theory, which is 'essentially a theory about sensemaking: how people try to make sense out of their environment and behavior' (Aronson, 1999, p.105). To make sense of disruptions to understandings of self or 'who I am' and 'how should I behave' our HRPs drew on organisational expectations, professional codes of conduct and wider discourses about the right thing to do. They (temporarily) took up particular identity positionings (e.g.

by aligning themselves with '*what is best for the company going forward*' illustrated in comments such as '*you are the company*') to justify their actions and achieve an understanding of self in that context that they could live with. This functioned in particular ways – e.g. to downplay individual agency in deference to that of the organisation. In such situations the role expectations of representing the company both gave rise to experiences of dissonance and simultaneously helped participants to achieve consonance by aligning with this temporarily salient self. This internal sensemaking was complemented by sensemaking through discussions with others. Participants calibrated their situated sense of selves through social validation processes i.e. seeing how others supported/challenged performed selves and also venting, narrating and sharing with like-minded others. As such sensemaking was a dynamic interaction between how an incident was framed, reacted to and evaluated and was also co-constructed between individual, social and organisational levels. Such identity work is testimony not only to the fluidity of worker identity but to the process of self-fragmentation and multiplication. It also highlights the influence of contextual factors (multiple/ contradictory role expectations and display rules; others' reactions; risks of non-compliance) in the experience, and resolution, of dissonance which have been obscured in individualised accounts of ED.

By including sensemaking and contextual factors in conceptualisations of ED we can see ways in which dissonance can be framed either as problematic or productive and with differing consequences in different contexts (explaining some competing findings around dissonance effects). Our sense of what version of self is possible, desirable, or legitimate is influenced by the immediate reactions of others and wider organisational, professional and societal cues as to what is valued. Where personal, relational and organisational selves align,

dissonance is unlikely to be experienced. Thus ED is part of a situated experience to construct a narrative of self that the person can live with.

Furthermore, in the EL literature dissonance is seen as arising from managerial attempts to control subjectivity (Hochschild, 1983; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Our findings show behaviour was very much constrained by organisational rules/expectations about who they should be and how they should behave. There were strong echoes in participants' accounts of, in Ashforth and Schinoff's (2016) terms, sensegiving (e.g. through display rules; norms) and sensebreaking (e.g. contradictory expectations; requiring the individual to take action that fulfilled one aspect of the HR role but contradicted another) shaping the individual's construction of a situationally salient self. Indeed the dominance of the organisational discourse on how the HR role should be done was particularly evident when our HRP's discussed interactions where they had to enact organisational decisions which they believed to be unjust and where they expressed what they believed to be rightful or more 'human' feelings but felt bad because displaying such feelings contravened role expectations, demonstrating they had internalised management prescription.

However, in certain situations rules derived not just from organisational prescription but from wider societal and occupational norms shaping participant's own expectations for the role. Subjectivity is thus not just a derivative of organisational control based on corporate values, but emerges from complex negotiations between contextually diverse identities. So rather than seeing external influences as a totalising commercialisation (Hochschild, 1983) of a HRP's real feelings we would argue that dissonance arises due to *contradictions in external expectations,* such as competing role expectations. These influences are powerful and create serious challenges for participants in responding to competing demands however there is

nonetheless the possibility for some agency in their response i.e. in how they interpret cues, make sense of requirements and respond to them. Only seeing EL and the experience of dissonance from a control/subordination perspective may obscure positive outcomes of EL. Rules, as Bolton (2000) notes, may constrain behaviour but they are the result of continual interpretation and negotiation which produce an ever-shifting framework for action.

This is not to allow organisations to abdicate responsibility for creating an emotionally healthy environment. Even though it may not be because of an alienation of an authentic self, performing EL can be distressing (Grandey, 2000; Hulsheger & Schewe, 2011), it requires effort that is often unacknowledged and unpaid. Furthermore, employees are subordinated by their place in the hierarchy and inequity in power relations making them vulnerable and exploitable. This vulnerability is highlighted when we consider that management has the potential to measure performance and apply sanctions for non-conformance with requirements. So while we acknowledge the individual's capacity for agency, this can be severely constrained by organisational structures and management practices. Thus organisations have a duty of care to understand the struggle and contextual pressures on identity (re)construction that performing EL can pose and to assess the factors and organisational processes that can work to facilitate or frustrate employee EL and identity construction efforts.

The approach developed in this paper offers a more dynamic view of EL and the experience of dissonance and moves conceptualisation on to reflect the complexity of identity construction and indeed the possibility of positive outcomes of EL for the individual (such as a sense of self-efficacy and esteem from satisfying identity motives). Rather than starting from the premise of real/false and a negative view of EL, future research should consider the individual's capacity for multiple selves and as such further explore the sensemaking

practices in which they engage to construct a situationally salient self and the contextual and management practices that help/hinder this process. It should also examine the influence of relational and interpersonal mechanisms in both creating and resolving experiences of ED, which to a large extent have been ignored (Côte, 2005). At a broader level, important dimensions of identity such as gender, nationality and family roles that influence identity construction were not explored here and thus it would be interesting in future research to examine how such dimensions of identity influence experiences of dissonance.

The dynamic view of EL presented here shifts practical implications from recruiting for 'the right sort of person' who has the innate ability to perform EL without negative consequences, or training employees to produce appropriate displays, to consider more critically what roles demand in terms of emotional displays and in particular how competing and ambiguous expectations can have detrimental effects on employees. Also, for practitioners, the idea of a self as a dynamic and multiple concept may offer new insights into their workplace activity and relationships and could be incorporated into reflective practice as part of professional development. Furthermore, as we have seen, individual and social sensemaking practices can alleviate the distress of ED, as such organisations should assess the culture and opportunities for social sharing and validation, the absence of which is likely to lead to detrimental effects.

There are some limitations to these findings. What is presented here is a contestable social construction (Craib, 1997) but the intention is to give an interpretive portrayal rather than an exact picture of the world. The detailed data about specific interactions and the richly nuanced picture that has emerged gives enough interpretative sufficiency (Denzin, 2001) to connect the reader to the world of participants to facilitate an understanding of their experience as they understand it themselves. Generalising from a small sample of HR

professionals may also be seen as problematic but analytical (Yin, 1989), rather than statistical generalisation is sought here and it is hoped that the conceptual insights will further our understanding of ED, in-situ sensemaking and its impact on well-being.

Conclusion

Emotional Labour theorising has fed into the myriad of popular discourses which encourage individuals to understand identity in simplistic terms of real/false. As a result, notions of an 'authentic' self have not only pervaded the academic literature but also organisational talk and practices which encourage employees to assume an organisationally mandated self and leave the real self 'at the door' or to privatise certain aspects of the self that are not productive (e.g. 'don't take it personally'). Indeed, even recent attempts to reverse the bureaucratic idea that employees must adopt an organisational persona at work are also underpinned by the concept of 'authenticity'. Fleming & Sturdy (2011) for instance note that the 'just be yourself' discourse which has become popular in many organisations encourages workers to express their 'authentic' selves at work and can be seen in the managerial practice of encouraging employees to bring informality, local accents, and 'personalised' rather than scripted approaches to service encounters. Whilst such practices are criticised for being a 'distraction tactic' to take attention away from the enduring dysfunction of organisational control and attempts to secure more 'authentic' EL performances (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011), the conversation is still anchored in notions of an essentialist self and assumes one true self.

We need to change the conversation to one that acknowledges the capacity for multiple selves which are often competing or contradictory. There is certainly struggle in interactions involving EL but not a struggle between authentic and inauthentic selves. It is a situated struggle over multiple possible displays and selves as the individual tries, in the face of

organisational norms and a management prescribed 'preferred self'; conflicting role expectations; and others' reactions/expectations, to reach a 'crystallised' or a situationally salient self that enables them to feel comfortable during and after EL performances. The discourse of authenticity, we argue, has served to intensify the potential for negative consequences from EL as it not only contributes to employees feeling that they are being 'fake' and lacking in individuality but encourages them to believe that they should feel a sense of truth and coherence of self, to strive for a one true self which, given the complexity and ambiguity of many work roles is unlikely to be achieved.

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